NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: Agencies and Interested Parties

From: California Department of Water Resources

Date: March 4, 2013

Subject: Announcement of:

1. Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report on the Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage project.

2. Public Scoping Meetings to be held in March 2013; and

3. Scoping Comments due by April 4, 2013.

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) will prepare a joint environmental impact statement /environmental impact report (EIS/EIR) for the Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage project (proposed project for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) purposes) in Yolo, Solano, and Sutter counties, California. The EIS/EIR will be prepared pursuant to CEQA (California Public Resources Code [CCR], Section 15222 [State CEQA Guidelines]) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 United States Code [USC] Section 4321 et seq.). DWR will be the lead State agency in accordance with CEQA, and Reclamation will be the lead Federal agency in accordance with NEPA.

PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION: The purpose of a notice of preparation (NOP) is to notify responsible and trustee agencies, Federal agencies involved in approving or funding a project, and interested parties that an EIR will be prepared. The NOP should provide sufficient information about the proposed project and its probable environmental impacts to allow recipients the opportunity to provide a meaningful response related to the scope and content of the EIS/EIR, including the potentially significant and significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures that the responsible or trustee agency will evaluate in the EIS/EIR (State CEQA Guidelines CCR Section 15082[a][1]).

The location, description, and potential environmental impacts of the proposed project are presented below. An initial study has not been prepared because the EIS/EIR will address all issue areas and it is already known that the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment. The EIS/EIR will also include feasible mitigation measures, where available, and consideration of a reasonable range of alternatives to avoid or substantially reduce the proposed project's significant adverse environmental impacts.

The purposes of this NOP are to:

1. Notify the appropriate parties that an EIS/EIR will be prepared for the proposed project;

2. Briefly describe the proposed project and the anticipated content of the EIS/EIR;

3. Announce the public scoping meetings to facilitate public input; and

4. Solicit input by April 4, 2013, from Federal, State, regional, and local agencies, and from interested organizations and individuals, about the content and scope of the EIS/EIR, including the alternatives to be addressed and the potentially significant environmental impacts.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND NEED: Significant modifications have been made to the historic floodplain of California's Central Valley for water supply and flood damage reduction purposes. The resulting losses of fisheries rearing habitat, migration corridors, and food web production for fish have hindered native fish species that rely on floodplain habitat during part or all of their life cycle.

On June 4, 2009, NMFS issued its Biological Opinion and Conference Opinion on the Long-term Operation of the Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP) (NMFS BO). The NMFS BO concluded that, as proposed, CVP and SWP operations were likely to jeopardize the continued existence of four anadromous species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA): Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Central Valley steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and Southern Distinct Population Segment (DPS) North American green sturgeon *(Acipenser medirostris)*. The NMFS BO sets forth Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) actions that would allow continuing CVP and SWP operations to remain in compliance with the ESA.

RPA actions I.6.1 and I.7 address salmonid habitat restoration actions in the lower Sacramento River basin, and fish passage actions in the Yolo Bypass, respectively. The Yolo Bypass, which currently experiences at least some flooding in approximately 80% of years, still retains many characteristics of the historic floodplain habitat that are favorable to various fish species. The primary purpose of the Yolo Bypass is flood damage reduction, but other important functions include agriculture and wildlife habitat. Major California restoration planning efforts over several decades (e.g., CALFED, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan) have focused on the Yolo Bypass as a prime area of the Sacramento Valley for enhancement of seasonal floodplain fisheries rearing habitat.

The two RPA actions being addressed in this EIS/EIR include:

- RPA Action I.6.1: Restoration of Floodplain Rearing Habitat, through the increase of seasonal inundation within the lower Sacramento River basin; and
- RPA Action I.7: Reduce Migratory Delays and Loss of Salmon, Steelhead, and Sturgeon, through the modification of Fremont Weir and other structures of the Bypass.

The need for the project is to comply with RPA actions 1.6.1 and 1.7, as described in the NMFS BO in order to remain in compliance with the ESA. The project objectives are to create more suitable conditions for fish in the Yolo Bypass and/or lower Sacramento River basin by implementing RPA actions I.6.1 and I.7, as described in the NMFS BO and the 2012 Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage Implementation Plan, and incorporating actions to improve conditions for species listed under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). The objective of RPA action I.6.1 is to restore floodplain fisheries rearing habitat for juvenile Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon, Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon, and Central Valley steelhead. This action can also improve conditions for special status species, including Sacramento splittail (*Pogonichthys macrolepidotus*) and Central Valley fall-run Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*). Specific biological objectives include:

- Increase access to, and acreage of, seasonal floodplain fisheries rearing habitat;
- Reduce stranding and presence of migration barriers;
- Increase aquatic primary and secondary biotic production to provide food through an ecosystem approach; and
- Provide access to seasonal habitat through volitional entry.

The objective of RPA action I.7 is to reduce migratory delays and loss of fish at Fremont Weir and other structures in the Yolo Bypass. Specific biological objectives include:

- Improve connectivity within the Yolo Bypass for passage of juvenile salmonids and green sturgeon; and
- Improve connectivity between the Sacramento River and the Yolo Bypass to provide passage for adult Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon, Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon, Central Valley steelhead, and Southern DPS of North American green sturgeon.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The objective of the project is to create more suitable conditions for fish in the Yolo Bypass and/or lower Sacramento River basin by implementing RPA actions I.6.1 and I.7, as described in the NMFS BO and the 2012 Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage Implementation Plan. Both physical and operational modifications will be included in efforts to increase seasonal inundation and improve fish passage. The project location is shown in Figure 1.

RPA action I.6.1 includes floodplain fisheries rearing habitat restoration in the lower Sacramento River basin. Several physical and operational modifications would be a part of efforts to increase seasonal inundation. Modifications could include notching Fremont Weir and/or the Sacramento Weir to allow flows to enter the Yolo Bypass during a range of flows in the Sacramento River, improving passage at Lisbon Weir, grading or altering channels to improve connectivity, changing operations to increase the frequency and duration of inundation, and identifying and addressing potential areas that could strand fish.

RPA action I.7 includes changes to improve fish passage within the Yolo Bypass. Elements of the proposed project could include replacing road crossings that impair fish passage, constructing fish passage facilities at Fremont Weir, connecting isolated pools to main channels, improving fish passage at Lisbon Weir, and addressing other obstacles to fish passage.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: The EIS/EIR for the project will likely evaluate a range of measures to achieve the project objectives, including restoration activities within the Yolo Bypass and lower Sacramento River basin to improve fisheries rearing habitat and fish passage. The EIS/EIR will describe the direct and indirect potentially significant and significant environmental impacts of the proposed project. The EIS/EIR will also evaluate the cumulative impacts of the project when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

Probable environmental effects include:

- Water resources, including groundwater: changes to inundation in the Yolo Bypass could change flows in the Sacramento River when flows enter the bypass system. Recharge to the groundwater system may also be increased because of longer periods of inundation.
- Flood control: modifications to structures within the Yolo Bypass could affect flow patterns; however, the design would maintain flood control capacity of the bypass system.
- Land use, including agriculture: modified inundation timing could take land out of production, which could affect prime farmlands, Williamson Act lands, and other open space protection plans.
- Biological resources, including fish, terrestrial wildlife, and plant species: restoration of fisheries rearing habitat and improved fish passage would benefit multiple species of juvenile and adult fish. Modifications to flows in the Sacramento River because of increased flows into the Yolo Bypass could affect fish within this stretch of the river. Changes to inundation patterns in the Yolo Bypass could affect existing vegetation and food production for waterfowl.
- Hydrology/water quality: increased area, depth and duration of seasonal floodplain inundation within the Yolo Bypass could affect water quality including dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrogen, pesticides, and methylmercury. Construction activities also have the potential to affect concentrations of these constituents.

- Air quality: construction could cause temporary, short-term increases in emissions of criteria pollutants or their precursors.
- Global climate change/greenhouse gas emissions: construction could cause temporary, short-term increases in greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. Climate change effects (sea level rise) on the project will also be considered.
- Recreation: inundation changes could affect food supplies for waterfowl, thereby indirectly affecting recreational opportunities.

Other resource areas and issue areas that will be addressed in the EIS/EIR include: socioeconomics; environmental justice; cultural resources; power/energy and natural resources; public services and utilities; hazards and hazardous materials; geology, soils, and mineral resources; visual, scenic, or aesthetic resources; Indian trust assets; noise; population and housing; and transportation.

These issue areas will be discussed further in the EIS/EIR, and mitigation measures will be recommended wherever feasible to reduce potentially significant and significant impacts.

SCOPING MEETINGS: Two public scoping meetings will be held to inform interested parties about the proposed project and to solicit agency and public input on the scope and content of the EIS/EIR:

- Thursday, March 14, 2013, 1:30pm – 3:30pm (brief presentation at 1:30pm)
- Thursday, March 14, 2013, 6:30pm – 8:30pm (brief presentation at 6:30pm)

The first scoping meeting will be held at the West Sacramento Community Center, 1075 West Capitol Avenue, West Sacramento, California. The second scoping meeting will be held at City of Woodland Community Center, 2001 East Street, Woodland, California. Each meeting will include a brief presentation about the project and then allow attendees to learn more and ask questions in an open-house format at several information stations.

If special assistance is required to participate in the public scoping meetings, please contact Traci Michel, Project Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Bay-Delta Office (contact information is provided below) as far in advance as possible, and no less than five days in advance, to enable Reclamation to secure the needed services. If a request cannot be honored, the requestor will be notified.

COMMENTS: This NOP is being circulated for a 30-day public comment period, beginning on March 4, 2013, and ending on April 4, 2013. Written or oral comments on the proposed content and scope of the EIS/EIR can be provided at the public scoping meetings, or written comments may be provided directly to Reclamation. Comments must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on April 4, 2013. When submitting comments, agencies that will need to use the EIS/EIR when considering permits or other approvals for the proposed project should:

1. State if they are a responsible or trustee agency for the project, and if so, explain why, and note the specific project elements that are subject to their regulatory authority.

2. Identify any significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures which they will need to have explored in the draft EIR;

3. Provide the name, email address, and phone number of a contact person.

Please send all written and/or e-mail comments to Traci Michel, Project Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Bay-Delta Office, 801 I Street, Suite 140, Sacramento, CA 95814-2536; fax to 916-414-2439; or e-mail at tmichel@usbr.gov.

Before including your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, please be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment that your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, Reclamation and DWR cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

All comments received during the public comment period will be considered and addressed in the Draft EIS/EIR, which is anticipated to be available for public review in winter 2014.

3/1/13

Date

Signature

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Title

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